

Fears home insulation boom creates a climate where fungi flourish

Kelly Burke

CONSUMER AFFAIRS

THE push to make buildings more energy-efficient is making some homes uninhabitable.

As interiors become more tightly sealed from the outdoor elements through Government-mandated energy-efficient reforms, an increasing number of homes are displaying symptoms of an affliction thought to have disappeared half a century earlier: extreme condensation.

The tiny droplets of water produced indoors by people breathing, cooking and bathing have nowhere to escape in her-

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metically sealed homes, architects and building experts have warned.

Poor ventilation, combined with Government-encouraged modifications such as ceiling batts and foil sarking under roofs, can lead to ceiling cavities literally raining inside, rotting plasterboard and timber and the **flourishing of indoor fungi**, as Margaret Ogston, of Killara, recently learnt.

The cost of her \$600,000 renovation is expected to double before repairs to her 40-year-old home make it habitable again.

Her vacant house was being

renovated late in 2007 and was locked up for several weeks. When she unlocked the door she was greeted with a pungent odour and wet floors.

Six months later, the house's walls and ceilings were sprouting fungus. When the roof manhole was opened, water gushed out "like a waterfall". The new insulation was sodden, rendered useless by the installer's failure to ventilate the roof.

"The air is still toxic, there's black mottle specks all over the white plasterboard and a green tinge to the floorboards," she said.

The architect and lawyer who was called as an expert witness in Ms Ogston's legal battle, Peter Sarlos, said the house was the worst example of condensation damage he had seen.

He said that, come the next sustained cold spell next April or May, he was expecting a flood of complaints as the full effects of the insulation boom brought about by the Federal Government's \$1600 rebate are seen.

He said layers of Government regulation, made without thorough consultation with the building industry, would be to blame.

The Australian Institute of Architects' building advisory service, Archicentre, and the Master Builders Association also raised concerns about the problem.

The Department of the Environment said its auditors had begun checking ceilings to ensure standards were being met, and action would be taken against any installer putting homes at risk.